The Colonial Background of British Foreign Policy

by

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THE COLONIAL BACKGROUND OF BRITISH FOREIGN POLICY

THE close connection between colonial interests and foreign policy hardly needs remarking at the present time, when an Imperial Conference is sitting—the fifth since Sir Edward (now Lord) Grey in 1911 made the important precedent of a full discussion of foreign affairs. The position of the Empire in the comity of nations to-day defies the analysis alike of English and of foreign observers. The origin of its foreign policy on any specific question may be found in any of the many capitals of its component parts, and if it was difficult to predict its action in a crisis of sixteen years ago, the difficulty

to-day is multiplied sevenfold. But while this complexity is to some extent the product, as are so many other problems, of the war and post-war eras, the beginning of the influence of colonial affairs upon foreign policy goes back over many generations. It goes back indeed to the time when the Empire had its birth—when the England of the sixteenth century, like the Venice of the twelfth, started a colonial expansion which was closely allied to trade. For nearly four hundred years this turning of her face to the ocean has vitally affected the relations between England and Europe. And this itself was the result of earlier changes. From the English standpoint there is an unwritten chapter in the history of creation, when her geographical unity with the continent was broken and the barrier of the Narrow Seas made ready for the broad highway of the Ocean.

It is true that England is not alone in being thus influenced in her policy by

expansion beyond Europe. She was not even the first of European Powers to feel its force. Portugal and Spain had been affected by it for more than a century before Tudor England first yielded to its strength. At a time when England was still prosecuting her mediaeval struggle with France, the mariners of Portugal and Castille were already seeking adventure on the African coasts. The year of Agincourt is also the year of the Portuguese capture of Ceuta, the traditional date for the beginning of the expansion of Europe through the medium of the Peninsular Powers. Henry V would have been surprised to learn that, in the future development of his country, his victory would rank lower than the capture of Ceuta.

But while Spain and Portugal, France and the Dutch were the predecessors or contemporaries of England in expansion overseas, the geographical position of England has given the colonial factor an influence

on her policy greater than its effect on theirs. The junction of England and Scotland, soon after the beginning of the colonial era, left England with no frontiers by land, and she therefore to a larger extent than her neighbours was free to face one way instead of two. In the critical period of the second half of the seventeenth century—the period whose importance in the history of colonial expansion surpasses, I think, that of any other—the two chief rivals of England were diverted by their European interests. The Dutch under William of Orange concentrated their attention on the safety of their European frontiers, while Louis XIV turned aside from the comprehensive colonial plans of Colbert to listen to the nearer counsels of Louvois. Charles II, it is true, after the fall of Clarendon, did little by his foreign policy directly to further colonial expansion. But the period of peace between 1674 and 1689 saw the foundation of England's colonial great-

ness ; and Charles II served his country better than he knew when he accepted the bribes of Louis XIV and kept a neutral attitude to Louis's wars. The ultimate supremacy of England in the colonial field is due, I think, more to this comparative freedom from territorial danger than to any inherent genius in the English race.

The insular position of England has not, however, meant that English policy has looked wholly or even mainly beyond Europe. She was freer than her neighbours from European ambitions and entanglements, but her policy has undoubtedly been determined primarily by European interests. She has had her eye, in friendship or distrust, on one European Power after another, and her motives for doing so have seldom been predominantly colonial. Anglo-Spanish rivalry in the sixteenth century, Anglo-Dutch in the seventeenth, Anglo-French in the eighteenth, have all been affected by, and I think in increasing measure determined by,

questions of colonies and colonial trade, but only at one period in these three centuries were colonial factors predominant. So also, in the newer Europe of the hundred years between the fall of Napoleon and the outbreak of the last war, colonial interests—in which I include Indian interests—were an important factor in the British attitude to Russia, and were partly responsible for the trend towards France rather than Germany in the pre-war *entente*.

The weighing of motives and factors is never an easy matter, for no subtle enough balance has ever yet been devised. And the difficulty in estimating the importance of colonial interests at any one of these periods is increased by a fact with which at first sight there is little connection. Since the beginning of the age of colonies England has never had a dictator. The policy of all statesmen has had to be framed or disguised to meet the differing views of colleagues or the prejudices of Parliament and the people. We are ana-

lysing therefore to some extent the motives of masses, and the fickleness of the mob needs no stress. In the eighteenth century England was called the country of *émeutes*, and in each of my four centuries public opinion has had an important effect. We have to seek where we can for indications of the causes for political action, accepting gladly any public explanations of policy, but always remembering that these may be made rather because the speaker would have it seem so than because it is.

This difficulty of assessing motives is particularly great in the first two centuries of oceanic enterprise, the sixteenth and the seventeenth. There is no question that English jealousy of the prior claims of Portugal and Spain overseas underlay the breakdown of the Anglo-Hapsburg *entente* in the middle of the sixteenth century, caused a fitful war with Portugal

in the first part of Elizabeth's reign and contributed later to the outbreak of the Anglo-Spanish struggle. There is no doubt that freedom of trade to the Spanish colonies was one among the gains for which James I hoped when he made peace with Spain in 1604 and planned an Anglo-Spanish alliance : that colonial interests seriously affected the negotiations with the Dutch of 1651–4 and the intervening Anglo-Dutch war, Cromwell's decision to fight Spain rather than France in 1654, and the diplomacy of the first ten years of Charles II. But even when we take the term in its widest sense, to include trade to our own colonies and those of other Powers, I doubt if at any time during this long period colonial interests predominated with British statesmen. Reasons of religion and the security of the State were more productive of the growing difficulties with Spain in the Elizabethan era. Foreign policy profited from the results of oceanic enterprise and the developments

of the two were closely intertwined ; but it is at least doubtful whether Drake would have been knighted in 1580 if friendship with Spain had been needed to serve other interests ; or whether Walsingham would have allowed his name to be included among the promoters of Drake's voyage [1] if the probability of conflict with the Spaniard—a probability to be reckoned with whatever the aim of Drake's expedition—had not fallen into line with the other objects of his policy. Elizabeth certainly prohibited Guinea voyages, because the growing danger from Spain made Portuguese friendship a necessity.

The same limitations of influence apply to the seventeenth century, though in smaller degree. James I made peace with Spain in 1604 without any concessions from her as to the trade to the Indies. And even the Interregnum governments, though far more really influenced by colonial ambitions, were distracted from them by other aims.

There is ample evidence, it is true, that in the years 1653–5 colonial interests held a place of great importance in foreign affairs. In 1653, when the Instrument of Government gave Cromwell a much freer hand in diplomacy than he had possessed before, England was in the midst of negotiations with Portugal, the Dutch, France and Spain. The result was an alliance with Portugal, a treaty with the Dutch and a war with Spain. The alliance with Portugal gave to England the free right of participation in colonial trade, which was one of the points over which the Spanish negotiations broke down. The treaty with the Dutch implied the Dutch acquiescence in the English recovery of her own colonial trade, Cromwell's irreducible minimum in the colonial sphere. But the history of the period shows clearly that the colonial question was not the paramount one. The colonial gains both of the Dutch treaty and of the Spanish war were almost negligible in

comparison with the schemes which preceded them. Cromwell gained his irreducible minimum from the Dutch in 1654, but in 1653 he had been discussing the possibility of an Anglo-Dutch war with Spain which would lead to a new division of the world between the two Protestant republics. As a substitute for this he supported the great Western Design of 1654–5, when England, unaided by the Dutch, was to block the Spanish trade route to her colonies, and prepare the way for a later conquest of the Spanish dominions. But when the first expedition failed, there was no second attempt. Cromwell finished with these great ambitions by clapping into prison the leaders who had made them fail, and by settling efficiently the one result of their attempt, the island of Jamaica. Then he turned his mind to a continental war, having, so Thurloe tells us, always desired a territorial foothold on the European coast.[2] Cromwell, whose dual-mindedness makes

it impossible to decide whether gain or godliness was the chief motive of his attack on the Spanish dominions, kept his attention fixed on continental advantages even while he planned oceanic enterprise. He, like Clarendon after him, really desired colonial expansion, and had an irreducible minimum in his mind when he negotiated with foreign Powers, but colonial ambitions throughout the period had about them still an element of chimæra, which made them worth one fling but not more. The grandiose projects which germinated in the minds of merchants as they whispered in coffee-houses or paced the walks of the Royal Exchange were too remote to be taken as the basis of a consistent foreign policy.

In the seventeenth century the unity of the Empire from the point of view of external relations was by no means clearly established. This lack of unity is all the

more striking since the colonies were then in very large measure part of the English realm from the economic and the administrative standpoints. It was the first instinct of all the colonial Powers to try to keep colonial rivalries from complicating their European policies. Thus at the beginning of the colonial era Spain invoked Papal authority to divide the inheritance of the New World with Portugal, and when the sanctity of the successive Papal lines had disappeared, made with France a verbal agreement which again sought to separate colonial and European relations. Beyond new 'lines of amity' marking off the region of her settlements in the new world, 'might should be right' and acts of war should not bring war in Europe. Thereafter the tradition held good for over a century. European Powers by common consent put to blind eyes the telescopes through which they might see hostilities in these distant lands. In 1654 Cromwell seems to have

considered that he could attack Havana and Hispaniola, the keys to the Spanish colonial trade, without necessarily involving England in war with Spain in Europe. It was not until 1667 that this diplomatic separation between the new world and the old was abandoned to some extent in Anglo-Spanish relations by the reference to colonial trade in the Treaty of Madrid.

The same object of separating European and non-European problems underlay the Anglo-French neutrality projects of the seventeenth century. The settlements of these two Powers, made at a time when Spain and the Dutch were their common foes in the colonial sphere, stood side by side in North America and the West Indies. The borders of Maine abutted on those of Acadie, and the English half of St. Christopher lay wedged between the two quarters of the French settlement. The Anglo-French wars of 1627–8 (the war forced on Charles and Buckingham by Protestant feeling in England) and of

Charles II in 1666–7 (when France was in alliance with the Dutch) had few incidents of importance in Europe; but they brought home forcibly to the most vulnerable of the British colonies the danger of being involved in European struggles. It was out of these wars that there arose in St. Christopher the first negotiations for local neutrality, an idea which found its fullest expression in the American Treaty of Neutrality of 1686.[3] "If ever any rupture shall occur in Europe . . . (which God forbid)" no acts of hostility should take place in any part of America, but "true and firm peace and neutrality" should continue "as if no such rupture had occurred." The failure of this treaty to avert an American war during the War of the League of Augsburg shows the growing measure of the diplomatic unity of colonial Powers. Colonial interests were rapidly maturing in the last years of the seventeenth century, and under their heady influence the treaties of neutrality

broke like old bottles under the pressure of new wine. From the end of the seventeenth century, though the principle of the blind eye might still be applied occasionally to incidents of small importance and the conception of treaties of neutrality still find expression in the East Indies, the colonial possessions of the European Powers had unquestionably been brought within the orbit of European diplomacy. War in Europe inevitably brought war in the colonies, and before very long colonial war was to involve England in European conflict.

The policy of the treaty of neutrality of 1686 broke down in less than three years, and its vanity was proved again in 1702 and 1740 when the wars of the Spanish and Austrian successions had their counterparts in colonial struggles. A comparison of the four inter-colonial wars, as Professor Osgood terms them, of the period

1689 to 1763 shows the truth of his conclusion that it was not until the fourth that colonial interests really demanded war. It is true that in the English and French colonies alike there were sections of the population who welcomed the opportunity of settling local differences ; but it was not until the middle years of the eighteenth century that the urgency of colonial rivalry made war inevitable. The first three wars in the main reflected European contests, though the third was closely connected with the Anglo-Spanish struggle over colonial trade ; in the fourth, colonial and not European causes were the more potent. On the eve of the fourth war—the Seven Years' War—for the first time colonial interests were the predominant factor in British foreign policy.

The reasons for the change are to be found first in the internal history of British and French colonial development. Expansion in North America and in the West Indies, rivalries in India and on the

African coast, had reached a point by 1750 when a struggle for power was inevitable. Britain and France were evenly matched in the competition for paramountcy in these regions, their interests were closely intertwined, and settlements on the basis of the *status quo* could no longer hold good. "In tracing the development of the Anglo-American colonies during the eighteenth century," writes Professor Osgood, "we have now reached a point where the influence resulting from the slow but steady expansion of more than a century began to make itself decisively felt upon the question of the balance between the French and the British on the continent."[4] The founding of Halifax in 1749 by the British, the refortification of Louisburg by the French, the building of the French Fort-le-Bœuf and Fort Duquesne on the Ohio, on territory which, according to Virginia, was Virginian soil, such incidents, to quote only a few of those which took place in only one of the

theatres of rivalry, show the new seriousness of the Anglo-French colonial struggle. Even more significant was the changing attitude of the colonial assemblies. Although in many cases still slow to agree on concerted measures for defence, they were a great deal more ready in 1754 than on the eve of earlier wars. In America as well as in England colonial defence was informed by a new vigour.

In England the causes of the change were two-fold. In the first place, British foreign policy was at length freed from the necessity of thinking first of the security of the throne. The War of the Austrian Succession had not settled in the eyes of Maria Theresa the Silesian dispute, nor in the eyes of Frederick the safety of his dominions; but there was another succession question which it had settled for ever. In the eyes of Britain and of Europe the fiasco of 1745 had laid the ghost of Jacobitism, and the main obsession of British foreign policy since 1689 had

disappeared. British statesmen were free at last to put more distant interests in the forefront of their programme. Secondly, English knowledge of the Empire had steadily increased during the years since the Revolution. The much-criticised Newcastle, whom the death of Pelham brought to the head of the Government in 1754, may have lacked the energy to read the official out-pourings from the colonies. But the mass of the material in his private correspondence which relates to colonial affairs bears witness to the fact that his secretaries at least must have had a fair working knowledge of the colonies. To supplement this there were the activities of the Board of Trade and Plantations, who by this time had stored up records of considerable volume, records which they used almost as meticulously as do the research students of our own generation. Moreover, if Secretaries of State or officials of the Board of Trade were in danger of overlooking colonial factors, there were

plenty of people in England who made it their business to remind them. Not only did the colonial agency system ensure that for each colony there was normally at least one accredited representative in London to guard their interests, but merchants in the City and non-resident or visiting colonists were always ready to give information to the Government. It is well known that the Elder Pitt matured much of his colonial policy in concert with city merchants, and the strength of colonial interests in the House of Commons gave them a great importance to so wily a Parliamentarian as Newcastle. By the middle of the eighteenth century the age of chimæra had passed. The colonies were no longer strange and fabulous, and their reality could be grasped by the imagination even of the most mediocre of statesmen.

The changes which took place in the

balance of colonial and European interests can be illustrated best from the history of the great treaty negotiations which punctuated the age of Anglo-French wars. From the time of the Revolution of 1688 to the downfall of Napoleon, rivalry with France was the main theme of British foreign policy. The unity of the drama is complicated by variations of the pattern, and there are several plays within the play, each of which is complete in itself. But the dramatic unity is not lost. In all the changing alliances of the period, one between England and France seemed the most unstable and unnatural. These two great Western Powers approached amity at two periods only, in the first half of the eighteenth century when the policy of Stanhope's Triple Alliance merged into the uneasy *entente* of the time of Walpole and Fleury, and in the years before the French Revolution when the Younger Pitt cultivated French friendship after the

greatest of his diplomatic achievements, the Treaty of Commerce of 1786. On neither of these occasions would the Anglo-French understanding bear the strain that was soon put upon it. In spite of the efforts to adjust differences by negotiation or war, rivalry between England and France was a constant factor.[5]

The great treaties of the period, Utrecht, Aix-la-Chapelle, Paris, Versailles and again Paris, were all concerned in part with colonial questions. At three of them, Utrecht and the two Treaties of Paris, Britain made important colonial gains ; one, Aix-la-Chapelle, was based on the principle of the *status quo*, and the other, Versailles, saw not only the independence of the American colonies, but substantial concessions to Britain's ancient colonial rivals. The colonial gains were greatest at the first of the two Treaties of Paris, that of 1763 ; but there are other reasons why this treaty may be regarded

as the high-water mark of colonial interests in diplomacy. At first sight the Treaty of Versailles is a serious rival. The war which it ended, that of American Independence, was obviously more colonial in its origin than any other. The intervention of France, Spain and the Dutch, disastrous from the English standpoint, was dictated largely by the jealousies left by old colonial rivalries. The attitude of Prussia is explained by Frederick's distrust of Britain, the result of the British preference for colonial over European interests in 1763. But the bargaining of the peace negotiations shows here, as in the treaties of 1713, 1748 and 1815, that colonial interests were not the first object of the statesmen responsible for its terms.

In all the treaties of the era, British negotiators had several objects to consider other than the extension of British dominions. I can suggest only a few of the most important, some purely European, some partly colonial. There was the

security of the English succession, important in 1713 and finally achieved, as I have said, by 1748 ; the safety of Hanover, important in 1748, but negligible afterwards, through the indifference of George III ; the security of the Narrow Seas (in practice the disposal of the Southern Netherlands), important in 1713 and 1815 and paramount in 1748 ; the safeguarding of British interests in the Mediterranean (in practice the retention of Gibraltar or the acquisition of other Mediterranean posts), important in all the treaties ; the extension of trade, particularly the trade to the Spanish Indies, and the maintenance of oceanic sea-power, rated higher than colonial conquests in 1713 and 1815 and not so high as the retention of Gibraltar in 1783. In all the treaties except that of 1763 there is evidence that one or other of these objects was valued higher than colonial security or expansion. In all the treaties, except that of 1763, while some of the objects which were considered

of first importance were connected with colonies, the more purely colonial the object the less the importance attached to it. In 1713 British ministers put first the security of the succession, the safeguarding of the Narrow Seas, and naval power in the Mediterranean ; and, among quasi-colonial objects, priority of trade over France in fur, fish, and slaves. To safeguard the Narrow Seas in 1748 Britain sacrificed the colonial conquest of Louisburg, the sentinel of the highway of French colonisation in America. To keep Gibraltar in 1783 Britain refused Spanish offers of compensation in the West Indies and on the American mainland. In 1815, when Britain was once more in a position to dictate terms, the security of the Narrow Seas was an object far more important than the retention of colonies ; Java was returned to the Dutch, and the decision as to which of the British colonial conquests should be retained was based on the principles of the maintenance of

oceanic and Mediterranean sea-power and the development of British trade. Both European and quasi-colonial objects were thus preferred to those purely colonial.

I have left to the last the treaty of 1763, where, as I have already suggested, colonial interests were in my view predominant.[6] Britain in the final result kept Canada and the Floridas and made the Mississippi the frontier of British dominion. She gained also cessions from France on the African coast and in the West Indies, but she gave back the pearl of the French West Indies, Guadeloupe.

She left the German war unfinished. The succession of George III had removed one cause for British concern in Europe, since he, unlike his predecessors, cared nothing for Hanover. The accession of Peter III to the throne of Russia removed another, for it freed Britain's ally Prussia from the danger of annihilation. Europe therefore could be left to take care of itself,

and Britain preferred peace and colonial conquests to the dictation of European settlement. It is not only in the latter fact that the treaty shows itself the high-water mark of colonial interest. The conclusion which I have suggested with regard to the other treaties is reversed here. In proportion as the gains were purely colonial in their advantages they were more and not less valued. It is true that in the famous controversy of Canada *versus* Guadeloupe, the issue is obscured by the division of the West Indian interest between those who wanted cheaper sugar and those who feared that the sugar of Guadeloupe would harm the prosperity of the older British colonies. But it is clear that in the final result George III and Bute put the purely colonial interests first. To gain territory on the American mainland they placed Britain in the peril of isolation in Europe and sacrificed the possibilities of an increased West Indian trade. George III, indeed, was a great

imperialist. In 1763 he put the interests of the American continent first, those of the West Indies second; he neglected those of Europe. Had he been as powerful twenty years later he would have put the West Indies before the Mediterranean, for he was himself prepared to surrender Gibraltar in exchange for the compensation offered by Spain. The failure of his American policy, which lowered his influence in 1783, has hidden his imperialism from posterity.

The decline in the influence of colonial interests on the foreign policy of Britain, of which the first signs can be seen in the Treaty of Versailles, remained constant for nearly a century. In the beginning this was no doubt due to the loss of America. But this period, when colonial interests were once more in the background of foreign affairs, was a time of great colonial expansion. Long before

it was over, the colonial Empire of Britain was many times greater than it had been in 1763. The westward expansion of Canada, the foundation and growth of settlements on the Australian coasts, the development of South Africa, and the colonisation of New Zealand would alone have secured this end. But this is not the whole of the tale of British expansion. British India was the product of this period. In 1763 the transformation of the East India Company into a territorial power had hardly begun. A hundred years later the Company was dead, but its legacy to Britain was an India almost as immense as the India of to-day. Moreover, in the continent of Africa British influence was penetrating to the interior, while the cession of Fiji in 1874 marked the extension of British colonial power to the Pacific. Britain had become a World Power in a sense quite unparalleled at the height of her eighteenth-century colonial greatness. She was the

Portugal and Spain combined of the new colonial era.

Nor were British statesmen long indifferent to these great developments. The new Empire had a governmental system far more carefully elaborated than the old. The half-century which followed the recognition of American independence saw the growth of an administrative diversity in the Empire which has been one of the chief reasons for its continuance. The crown colony system provided for nascent colonies, and for regions where racial problems made government difficult, a paternalism unmatched in the history of the eighteenth century. A little later the grant of responsible government to the growing dominions, reinforced by the adoption of free trade, permitted the rise of the great overseas settlements to a national status equally new.

It was not indifference which caused the relegation of colonial interests to a secondary place in diplomacy. The causes

are to be found in the effects of the French Revolution and the resettlement of Europe which issued from it. In the first place, the Napoleonic Wars gave Britain for over a century an unquestioned superiority by sea. This unprecedented mastery was the prime factor in the growth of the new Empire. It enabled Britain to extend her settlements unchallenged ; to maintain communications without interruption ; to make the unity of the new Empire a reality greater than that of the old. It made all oceans her highways, where the King's Peace was unbroken, and a woman with a bag of gold could travel in safety from one end of the Empire to the other. Secondly, the resettlement of Europe kept the other European Powers at home. The fear of a new revolution in France, the European crises of 1830 and 1848, the struggle between the despotism of Metternich and the workings of democracy and nationalism ; the growth and fall of the Empire of Napoleon III, the uprising

of the Balkans, and the unification of Italy and Germany—a succession of events so varied and momentous offered plenty of issues within the bounds of Europe to demand the attention of European Powers. France, it is true, seemed at times to remember her lost colonial glory. She marked out the lines of future expansion by returning to Senegal in 1817, by going to Algiers in 1830, and by entering the Pacific in 1842. But French excursions into colonial activity were few and unimportant compared with those of Britain, and Anglo-French colonial rivalry remained quiescent until the last twenty years of the nineteenth century.

Nevertheless, as in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, British policy towards Europe sometimes converged with her expansion beyond. In one aspect the two were closely connected throughout. The movement for the suppression of the

slave trade, inaugurated by Castlereagh at Vienna, was a constant feature of nineteenth-century diplomacy. Originally the offspring of English humanitarianism, the 'child of the saints,' the British zeal for the suppression of the slave trade was an important factor in colonial expansion. It added almost as rapidly as the slave trade itself to British influence on the African coasts. And this Cromwellian mixture of idealism and imperialism made much business for the Foreign Office, bringing Britain into difficulties particularly with her most ancient ally, Portugal, and occasionally with France. But these ripples were not sufficient, at least after 1820, to disturb the course of the main current.

Secondly, in the early part of the century the revolt of Latin America brought new world politics for a moment into contact with the old. Once again as in earlier centuries the wealth of the Indies seemed to be at stake; and while

the odour of revolution attracted the attention of the Holy Allies, France and England were both affected by the lure of El Dorado. But in 1823–4 the attitude of the United States and the might of the British fleet enforced the doctrine that "the influence of the (Continental) Powers ceased with the bounds of Europe,"[7] and ended the possibility of an incursion of the old world into the new. Canning indeed "had called the new world into existence to redress the balance of the old." But the very wording of his utterance shows that the prime motive of his policy lay in Europe.

There was, however, one aspect of British foreign policy where imperial interests became steadily more important. The safeguarding of India and the route to the East became as vital a factor in British policy as the safety of the Narrow Seas and the maintenance of Mediterranean sea-power. As the century advanced it affected increasingly the British

attitude to Russia. Russian control of the Dardanelles would weaken the value of British control of Gibraltar, and to this the traditional Mediterranean policy of Britain would have been opposed in any case. But opposition was strengthened by the growing importance of the Mediterranean as a route to the East. The modern significance of this factor dates from the inception of the Suez Canal; but the Eastern ambitions of Napoleon left a lasting fear that any alteration in the *status quo* in the Mediterranean would jeopardise the safety of British predominance in India. The policy of Palmerston and his successors in the Near East was undoubtedly affected seriously by this view. Even in the first half of the century, therefore, the defence of India had an important bearing on British foreign policy.

In the middle of the century its importance was doubled. For the fear of Russia took a new seriousness with her

Eastern expansion by land. From the fifteenth century until the nineteenth European access to India had been dependent on sea-power. Lord Brougham, writing in 1803 of the danger of Napoleon's Egyptian design, found consolation in the fact that "so long as Britain retains the decided naval superiority in Europe" [8] the threat to India could not be severe. But in the middle of the nineteenth century it seemed that sea-power would no longer suffice. The route of Alexander might be revived by an Empire which might also establish hegemony over the centre of Alexander's rule. The island of Britain had now a land frontier to guard. The government of India developed an active foreign policy, alternating between aggressive penetration and the cautious conciliation of the frontier states, as the government of Britain was in favour of seeking or avoiding the ultimate issue. At the time of the Panjdeh incident of 1885 it seemed inevitable that the question of

the Indian frontier would involve Britain in a general Anglo-Russian war.

The years 1884–5, the crisis of this period of Anglo-Russian relations, mark also the beginning of a time when colonial interests generally were to grow to a position of dominance in the foreign policy of Britain. By that time the France of the Third Republic was already seeking compensation for her European losses in colonial activity. The great period of French colonial expansion, like that of Germany, started in the eighties, and already those spectacular developments were foreshadowed by plans for the development of Algeria, the occupation of Tunis, and for French expansion eastwards from the Senegal. The simultaneous growth of British influence in Egypt, and on the east and west coasts of Africa, made a day of reckoning with France inevitable ; while the reassertion

of British control over the Boer Republics coincided also with the advent of Germany to East and South-West Africa. In the eighties the 'scramble for Africa' had begun.

The competition in Africa which thus started was soon to be paralleled by rivalry in the Pacific and for the trade to the Far East, reproducing in broad outline the old struggle for the mainland of America, the islands of the West Indies and the East Indian Trade. Now, as in the sixteenth century, the Powers sought to prevent competition beyond Europe from bringing war at home. The late nineteenth century saw an outburst of treaties and declarations defining boundaries and claims, and the formulation of doctrines of 'special interests,' 'spheres of influence' and local paramountcy in the hope of preventing conflict. But, as in the seventeenth century, it proved impossible to divide the new world from the old.

The change in British policy can be

traced back to the advent to power of Disraeli. His imagination stirred by the growing importance of the British Empire in the East, he had already declared in 1866 that Britain was "more an Asiatic Power than a European." In 1874 the beginning of his premiership brought new vigour to the defence of the Indian frontier, a new period of the growth of British influence in Egypt, and a new determination to establish British hegemony in South Africa. These three lines of advance meant danger in the future from three Great Powers, respectively Russia, France and Germany. War was averted with Russia and postponed with Germany. It was seriously threatened with France at Fashoda, and the lesson of Fashoda was driven home by the difficulties of the South African War.

This re-orientation of British foreign policy reached its climax in the period

1898 to 1906. Britain as a result interpreted anew the chief principle of policy which had characterised her action for nearly a hundred years. Her worship of a policy of 'isolation' was still indeed something more vital than lip-service; for, after the first shock at any rate, she was still loth to enter into engagements which should bind her to intervention in a European war. But this doctrine, which prevented an Anglo-German Alliance in 1901, permitted an Anglo-Japanese in 1902. Isolation, the creed of Britain as a European Power, need not be taken as that of Britain as a World Power. That is, in my view, the secret of the change. Though Lord Salisbury retired from the scene in 1902, it is, I think, true to say that the aim of British policy from 1898 to 1906 was at once to make lasting settlements with the Great Powers of Europe in colonial questions and to avoid entanglement in their rivalries on the Continent. Britain would be able to follow

in Europe her old policy of standing aloof from any disputes which did not involve her own interests, but she would escape the danger of an isolated struggle such as threatened her in 1885 and 1898. The final event was to show that in securing one of her objects she failed to realise the other.

The number of those interests which called for British intervention was largely increased. She had retained through the nineteenth century, though with varying interpretation, her traditional care for the safety of the Narrow Seas, in practice now, as in the eighteenth century, the disposal of the Southern Netherlands. She had kept also her regard for the balance of naval power in the Mediterranean, and her desire to maintain the independence of the smaller states of the European sea-board.[9] New obligations were now added to these. The Anglo-Portuguese declaration of 1899 merely reiterated ancient treaties, but it rein-

forced the British guarantee of the colonies as well as the Kingdom of Portugal, thus confirming the wider interpretation of 1873 rather than that of Canning. The hands of Britain would be tied in any issue with a Great Power which had its origin in the colonies of Portugal. More serious were the British obligations to France arising in 1904, for French relations with Germany and the importance of the interests involved made a crisis arising from them far more probable. The object of the *entente* Agreements was to settle the Anglo-French colonial difficulties, which had become pressing in the last thirty years of British and French expansion. Their central theme was French acquiescence in British influence in Egypt and British recognition of French interests in Morocco. There was no guarantee, as in the case of the Portuguese declaration; but the essence of the settlement was the principle of the *quid pro quo*, and the destruction of French

interests in Morocco would destroy the Anglo-French settlement as well. Diplomatic support of France in 1905–6 made clear the British interpretation of her obligations, and established in the eyes of Europe the reality of the Anglo-French *entente*.

The policy revealed in the breakdown of the negotiations with Germany in 1901 and the conclusion of the Anglo-French Agreements in 1904 is open to the criticism that British statesmen were trying to make the best of two worlds. Nearly a hundred years before, in 1815, the Prince Regent had been prevented from entering the Holy Alliance because, in the words of Professor Webster, " The ruler of Britain was not allowed to undertake any personal responsibility in his own name, not even that of upholding the principles of the Christian religion." [10] In 1901 the government of Britain refused to join the Triple Alliance, because the final decision in a European crisis lay with British public

opinion, and in Lord Salisbury's view no government with or without Parliamentary sanction could pledge public opinion beforehand without regard to the immediate cause of the crisis.[11] In the place of a general alliance came a wider definition of British interests. The primary object was to safeguard colonial peace; the ultimate result was participation in European war.

In the years 1898 to 1906 once more, as in the middle of the eighteenth century, colonial interests had thus an influence of paramount importance in British foreign policy. And again as in the earlier period the climax was followed by decline. My analysis ends with this second time of climax. Nor is this purely a matter of convenience. The new era of the twentieth century is marked by changes so momentous that the criteria of the past no longer apply to it. A recent writer has

pointed out one reason why arguments from the past may be of doubtful validity in the present. "The elimination of war as one of the normal methods of policy," he says, "would completely alter the whole character of international relations and the methods of diplomacy." [12] And while this change is conditional, there are other changes more certain which give an effective end to the four centuries of my survey. In the first place the position of the dominions to-day is radically different from that of any previous age. Their international status gives them the power of independent action even in foreign affairs. They are far more nearly allies than dependencies; and this is bound to have a vital effect on the course of British foreign policy. If the alliance continues it will be because it is to the interest of the allies that it should remain, and because of the strength of the tie of sentiment, on which Chatham would have relied in the days of the old Empire. "Colonies," now

even more than then, " are too great an object to be grasped but in the arms of affection." [13]

There is yet another change which is more decisive than anything else from the standpoint of my subject. The thread which binds together these four hundred years is breaking. It is the influence of sea-power. Upon this has depended the strength and importance of colonial affairs throughout the period to which I have referred. It has decided the character and to a great extent the balance of the interests which have governed British actions. The safety of the Narrow Seas has been, I think, during this long period the first object of British policy, for on that the safety of England has depended. Second in importance has been the distribution of power in the Mediterranean. And when these two objects have seemed assured, Britain has been free to put first the extension or security of her extra-European dominions. The common de-

nominator of these three aims is the power of the sea. And, if we envisage an era when the distinction between sea and land is devitalised by the power of the air, the axioms of our arguments vanish ; and a new system must be raised of which the foundations are still hidden in the clouds.

NOTES

[1] *Cp.* "The Missing Draft Project of Drake's Voyage of 1577–80," by Miss E. G. R. Taylor, in *The Geographical Journal* (January 1930), vol. lxxv. No. 1, pp. 46–7.

[2] John Thurloe, *Collection of the State Papers* (1742), vol. i. p. 762.

[3] *Cp.* F. G. Davenport, *European Treaties bearing on the History of the United States and its Dependencies* (Carnegie Institution of Washington, 1929), vol. ii. pp. 322–3.

[4] H. L. Osgood, *The American Colonies in the Eighteenth Century* (Columbia University Press, New York, and Humphrey Milford, 1924), vol. iv. p. 280.

[5] For a valuable summary by Mr. W. F. Reddaway of Anglo-French relations from 1660 to the end of the Seven Years' War, see chaps. x., xii., and xvi. of vol. i. of *The Cambridge History of the British Empire* (Cambridge University Press, 1929).

[6] *Cp.* H. W. V. Temperley, "The Peace of Paris," chap. xvii. of *The Cambridge History of the British Empire*, vol. i. pp. 485–506, for an analysis of the treaty negotiations.

[7] See H. Temperley, *The Foreign Policy of Canning, 1822–1827* (G. Bell & Sons, 1925), p. 142.

[8] Lord Brougham, *An Inquiry into the Colonial Policy of the European Powers* (Edinburgh, 1803), vol. ii. p. 336.

[9] *Cp.* Sir Eyre Crowe's reference to Britain as "the natural protector of the weaker communities" in his "Memorandum on the Present State of British Relations with France and Germany," dated January 1, 1907. See *British Documents on the Origins of the War*, vol. iii., edited by G. P. Gooch and Harold Temperley, with the assistance of Lillian M. Penson (H.M.S.O., 1928), pp. 402–3.

[10] C. K. Webster, *The Foreign Policy of Castlereagh, 1815–1822* (G. Bell & Sons, 1925), p. 59.

[11] See *British Documents on the Origins of the War*, vol. ii., edited by G. P. Gooch and Harold Temperley, with the assistance of Lillian M. Penson (H.M.S.O., 1927), pp. 68–9.

[12] Sir James Headlam-Morley, *Studies in Diplomatic History* (Methuen, 1930), pp. 4–5.

[13] *Cp.* Article by Charles H. Hull and H. W. V. Temperley, "Debates on the Declaratory Act and the Repeal of the Stamp Act, 1766" (*Amercian Historical Review* (April 1912), vol. xvii. No. 3, p. 573).

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